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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains examples of textile designs created by the Shoowa, a subgroup of the Kuba people of Zaire, Africa; the examples were part of the National Museum of African Art exhibition, "Shoowa Design: Raffia Textiles from Zaire." Additional information is provided about the Shoowa people and how Shoowa textiles are used, made, colored, decorated, designed, and embroidered. Space is provided for participants to draw their own textile design. The booklet also provides seven art gallery learning activities for people aged eight to adults that feature selected Shoowa design motifs. Black and white photographs and answers to the learning activities are included. (JHP)

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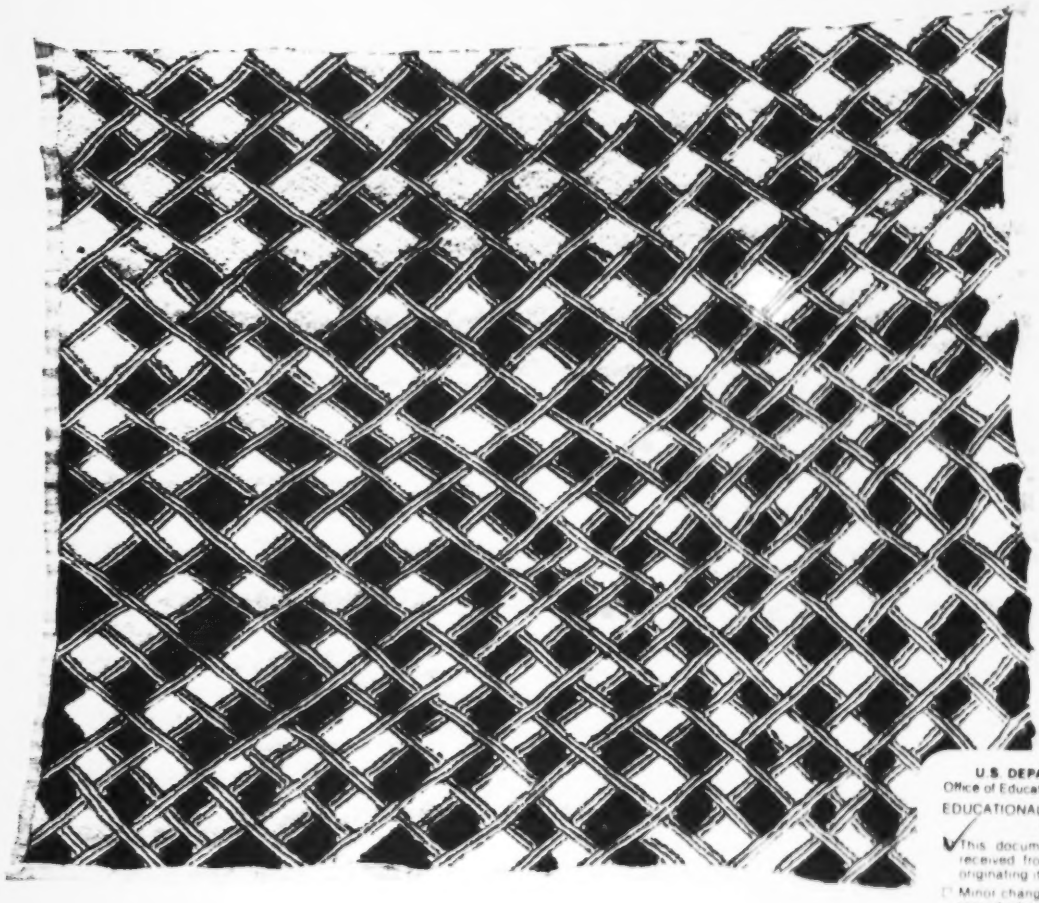
Discover Shoowa Design

Gallery Activities for Children and Adults



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Discover Shoowa Design

The Shoowa people are part of a larger group of people known as the Kuba. They live in the central African nation of Zaire. Several Kuba peoples weave and embroider cloth made of raffia palm fiber. The Shoowa are considered to make the finest examples.

There are many kinds of designs in Shoowa raffia textiles, but you have to look at them closely to see how they are arranged. Here is *your* chance to discover how different the designs are.

Using this booklet, you will look very closely at some of the textiles on display in the exhibition "Shoowa Design: Raffia Textiles from Zaire." Each activity in the booklet focuses on a specific textile.

The textiles for the activities are identified in the exhibition. Look for this shape ◆ next to a textile. It has a number that matches an activity in this booklet.

The answers for the activities are at the end of the booklet.

Have fun!

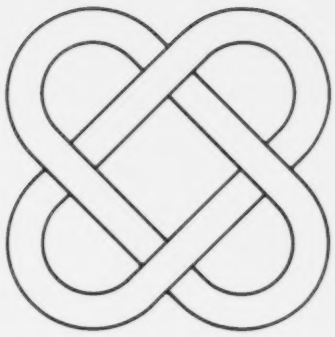
Shoowa Design Motifs

A *motif* is a single design element. Shoowa textiles are embroidered in patterns that use many different motifs.

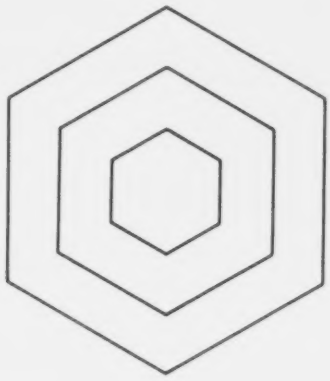
Shoowa motifs have been passed down from one generation to the next. They are used to decorate textiles, wine cups, woven wall mats, drums, masks, and wooden boxes.

Some motifs have been given names. A motif may have one name used by all Shoowa people, or its name may differ depending on the person using the motif.

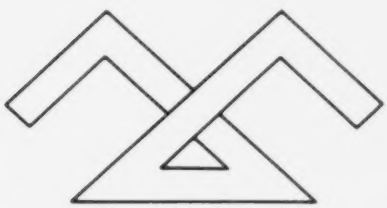
Here are pictures of four motifs with their names.



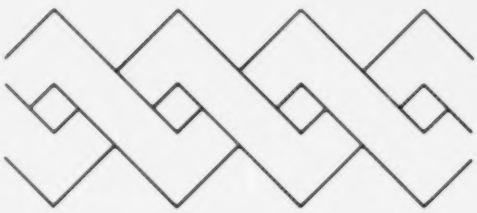
Imbol: This name means "basket working" or "knotting." It is one of the most common motifs used in Shoowa design. It is made up of intertwined loops.



Iyul: This name means "the tortoise." The motif is in the shape of a hexagon (a six-sided shape) and often has smaller hexagons inside.



Lakiik: This name means "eyebrows." The motif is in the shape of a triangle with two angled arcs.

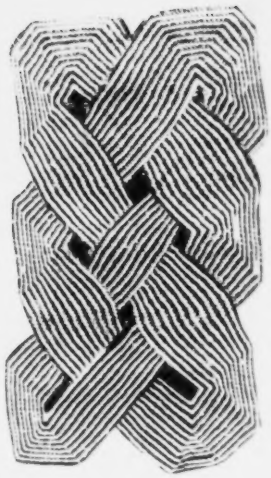


Nnaam: This name means "forest vines." The motif looks like two vines that are twisted together.

1

Activity 1

Shoowa Motif Looking Game

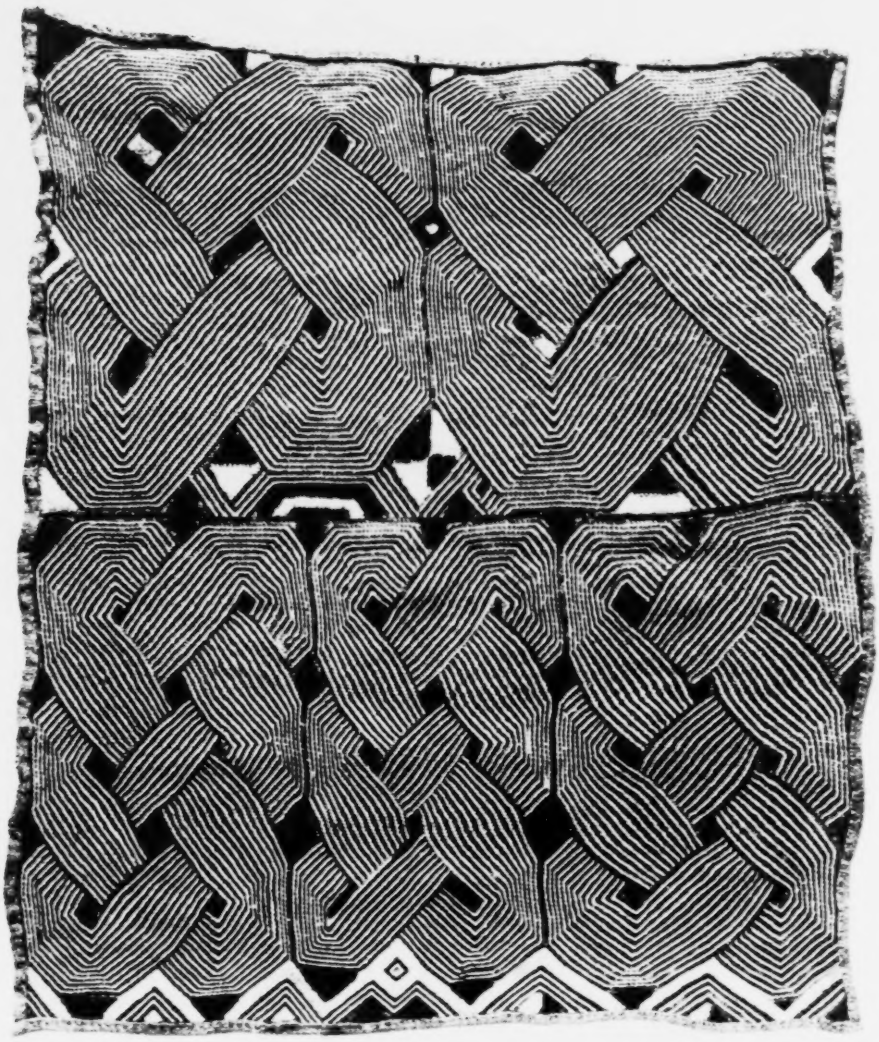


The Shoowa people call this motif *imbol*. This name means "basket working" or "knotting."

To the left as you enter the exhibition, find the textile that has this motif. Next, find the exact *imbol* in the textile.

Clue: The *imbol* motifs look alike, but they are different. Look at them closely!

When you find *this* imbol, circle it on this page.



2

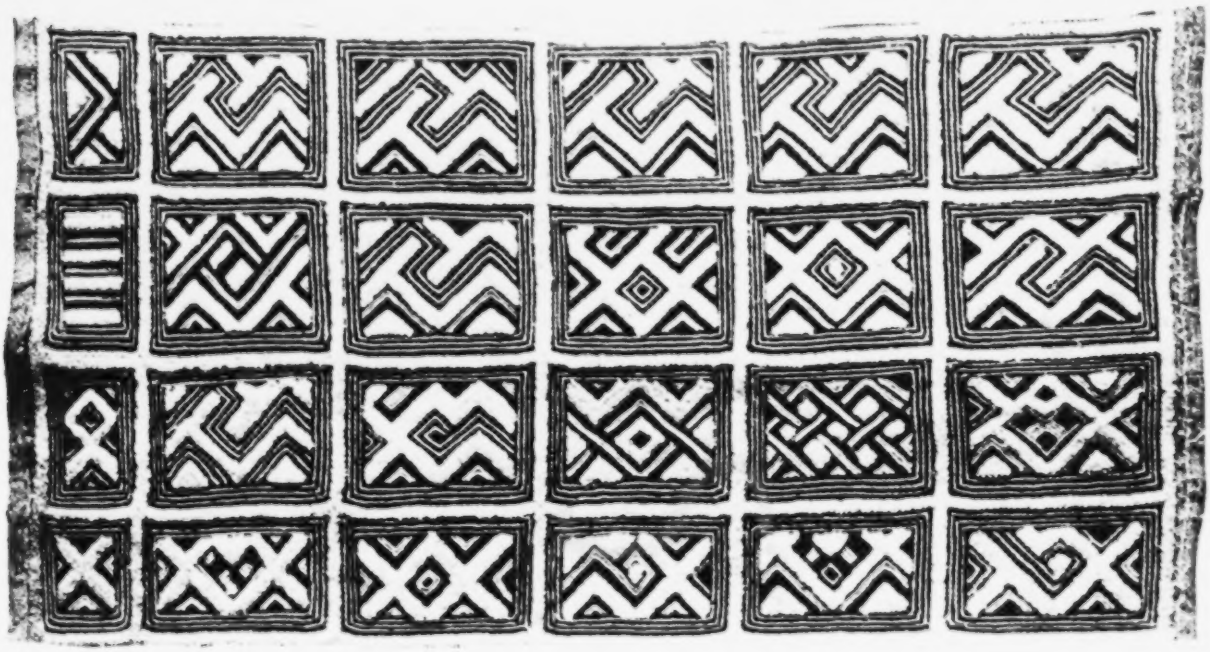
Activity 2
Look Again

Here is another Shoowa motif.

Which textile has this motif? It is also in the entrance section of the exhibition.

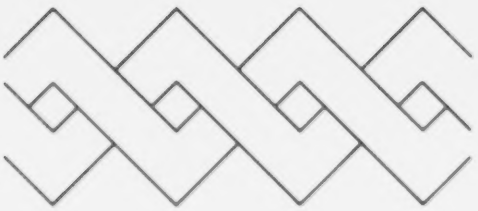
Where is *this* motif in the textile?

Circle the motif below when you find it.



This motif is found in different forms in this textile. A different form of one motif is called a *variation*.

Find two variations of the motif and circle them in the portion of the textile shown above. Look at other motifs and their variations in this textile.



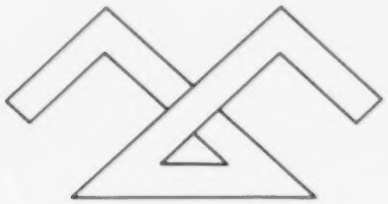
Activity 3
Hidden Motifs

The Shoowa people call this motif *mnaam*, which means "forest vines." Look for the textile with this motif.

How many *mnaam* motifs like the drawing above can you find

in the textile? _____

Clue: The *mnaam* motifs in the textile are a different size than the one shown on this page. Do not worry if you cannot find all of them.



Activity 4
Very Hidden Motifs

Sometimes Shoowa motifs are hard to find in a textile.

The Shoowa people call this motif *lakiik*, which means "eyebrows."

Why do you think they chose this name? _____

_____

Look for the textile with this motif.

Some of the motifs look like the one shown here, and others are upside down.

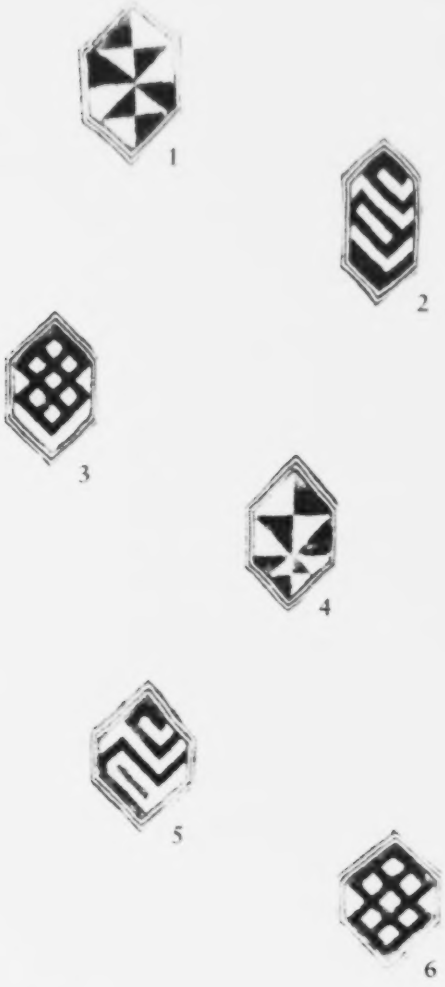
How many are upside down? _____

Activity 5

Shoowa Puzzle: Missing Motifs

Find textile number *5* in the exhibition. It is in an exhibition case, not on the wall.

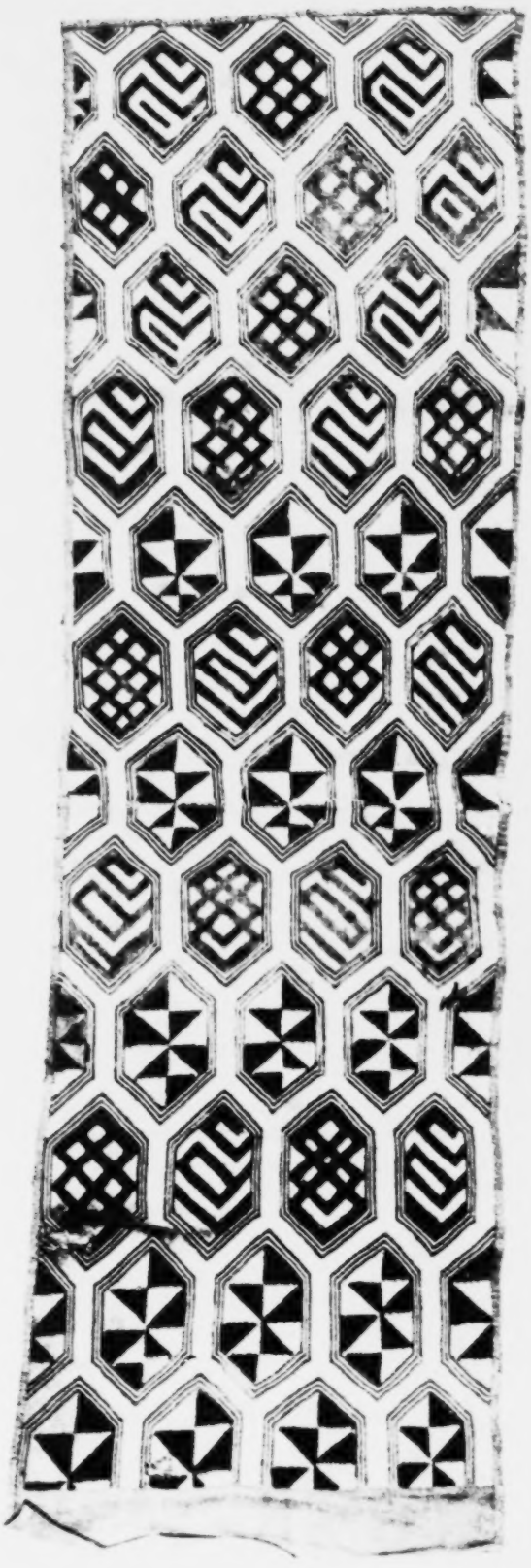
Look at the Shoowa motifs below.



*W**here*** do they belong?

To find out, look at the textile on exhibition.

Now, draw a line connecting each Shoowa motif to the place where it belongs in the textile.



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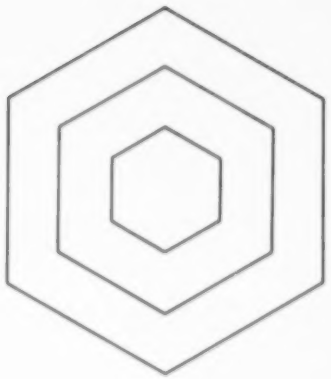
Activity 6

What Is in the Center of a Shoowa Motif?



The Shoowa call this motif *iyul*, which means "the tortoise."

Why do you think they call it "the tortoise"? _____

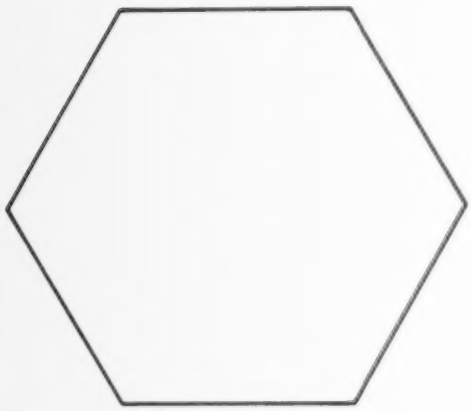
_____

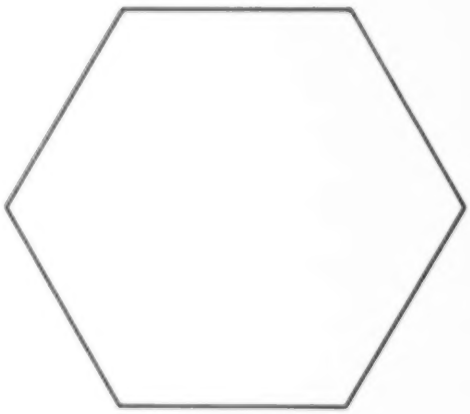
Textile number 6 has many *iyul* motifs. Look for *three* with different patterns in their centers. What colors are the different

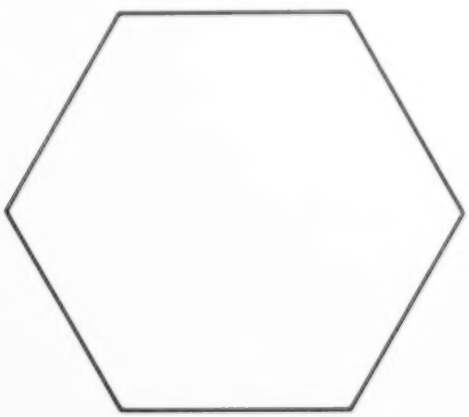
patterns? _____

_____

Below, draw the different patterns that you found in the centers of the three *iyul* motifs.





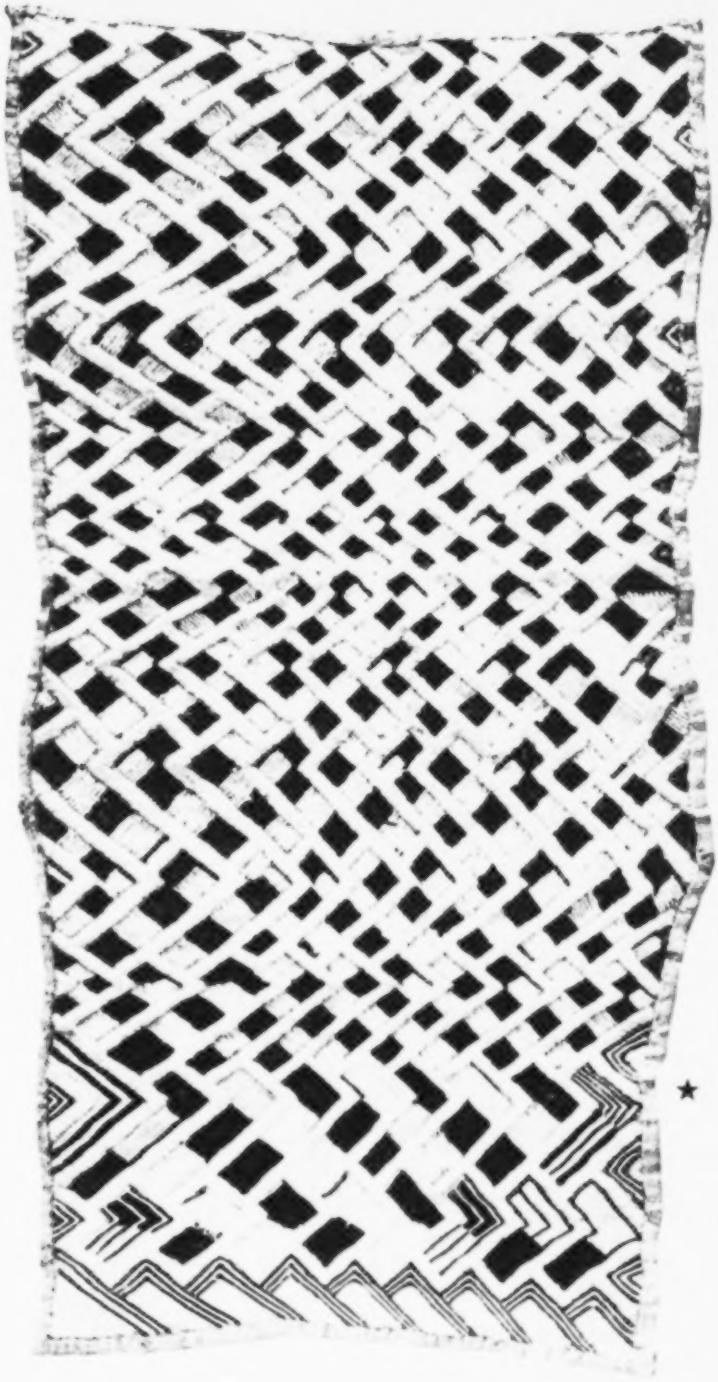


Activity 7
The Amazing Shoowa Maze!

Most mazes have only one way to enter and one way to exit. This maze is amazing because there are many ways to enter and exit!

Look for textile number 7. Look for the raised light-colored lines zigzagging from the top of the textile almost to its bottom.

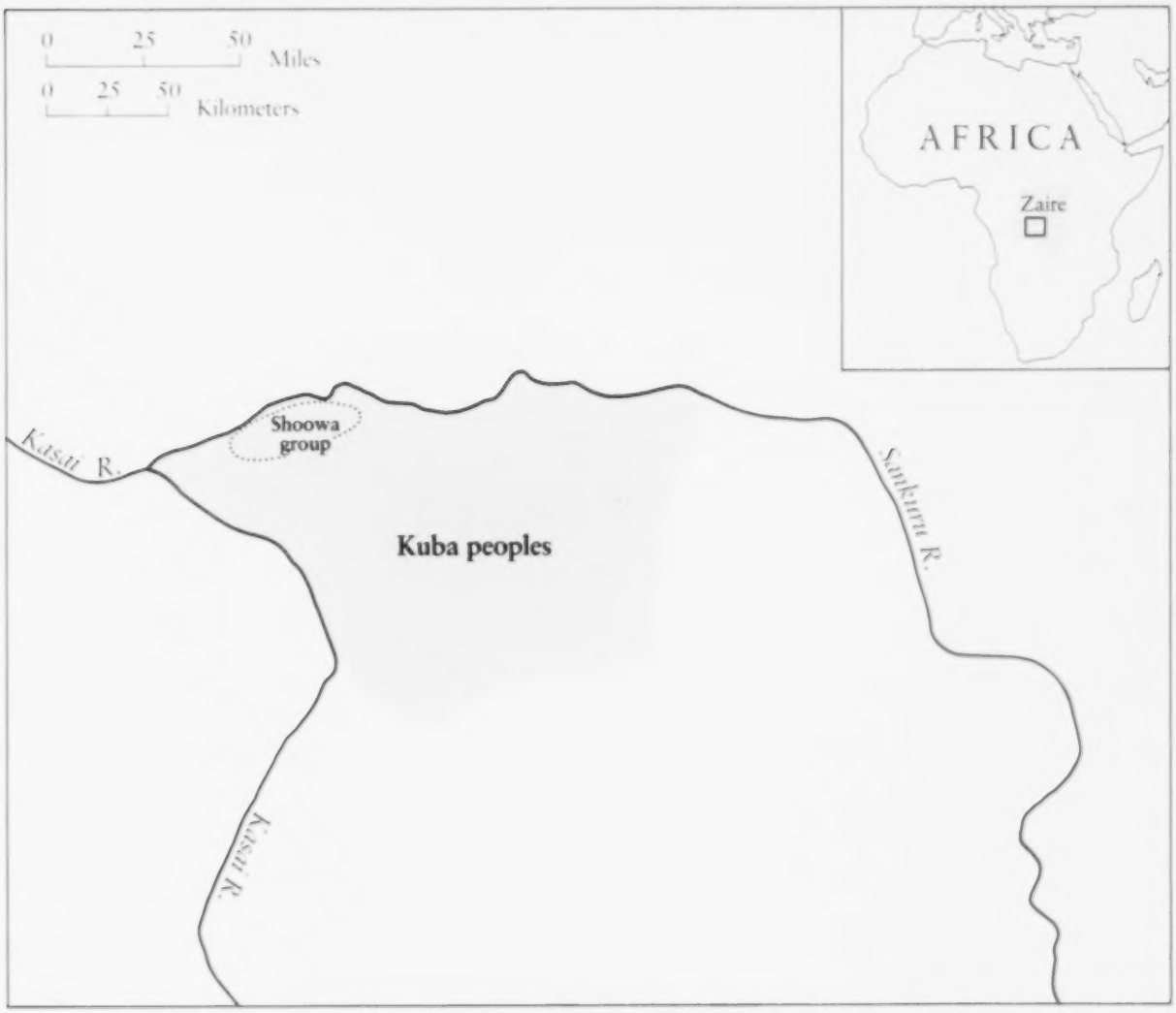
Start at the top of the textile shown here and follow one of these zigzagging lines to its exit at the ★.



Who Are the Shoowa People?

The Shoowa people are part of a larger group of people known as the Kuba. Kuba artisans weave textiles and wall mats, carve wooden wine cups, wooden boxes, and ivory fly-whisk handles, and make drums, harps, and masks.

The artisans of several Kuba peoples weave and embroider cloth made from raffia palm fiber. When raffia is woven into cloth, it is called a *raffia textile*. The Shoowa make the finest decorated raffia textiles of all the Kuba peoples.



Where Do the Shoowa People Live?

The Shoowa live in the central African country of Zaire. They have lived there since at least the seventeenth century. The Shoowa people live between the Sankuru River and the Kasai River in an area of open savanna. A savanna is a grassland area with scattered trees and undergrowth. The Shoowa farm, hunt, fish, and raise animals.

How Are Shoowa Textiles Used?

In the past, raffia textiles were used as money. The Shoowa exchanged them for other goods. Raffia textiles are still worn, enjoyed for their beauty, and kept as treasured possessions. They are also used as part of men's and women's attire in public ceremonies. For men, a woven and embroidered raffia strip may be used as a decorative border on a wrapper worn for special occasions. For women, several squares of raffia cloth sewn together make a wraparound skirt. At funerals, particularly court funerals, great numbers of raffia textiles may be displayed to honor the deceased.

How Are Raffia Textiles Made?

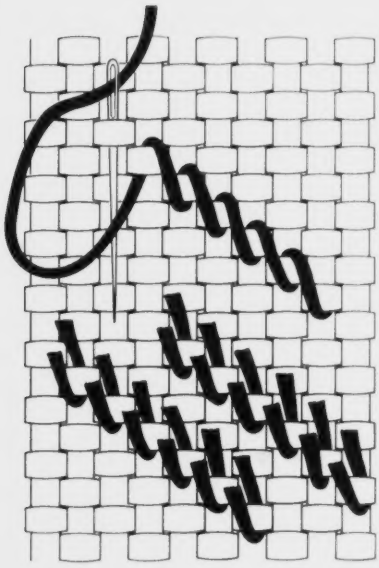
The first step in making a raffia textile is the preparation of raffia fibers for weaving. The raffia leaflet is split, scraped, and rubbed to produce raffia fibers for weaving. Shoowa men then weave the raffia fibers into cloth. The cloth is woven into a rectangular or square shape.

Man weaving raffia cloth, Mushenge, Zaire. *(Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, 1970)*

Where Do the Different Colors in the Textiles Come From?

After the men weave the raffia into cloth, women dye the cloth and the threads used for embroidery. They do this by dipping them into dyes made from different plants and other materials. The threads are dyed a variety of colors: orange, red, yellow, black, blue, or purple. Red dye is made from a special type of wood called *tukula.*

Women embroidering raffia cloth, Mushenge Zaire. *(Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, 1970)*



Top: overstitching; *bottom:* plush stitching.

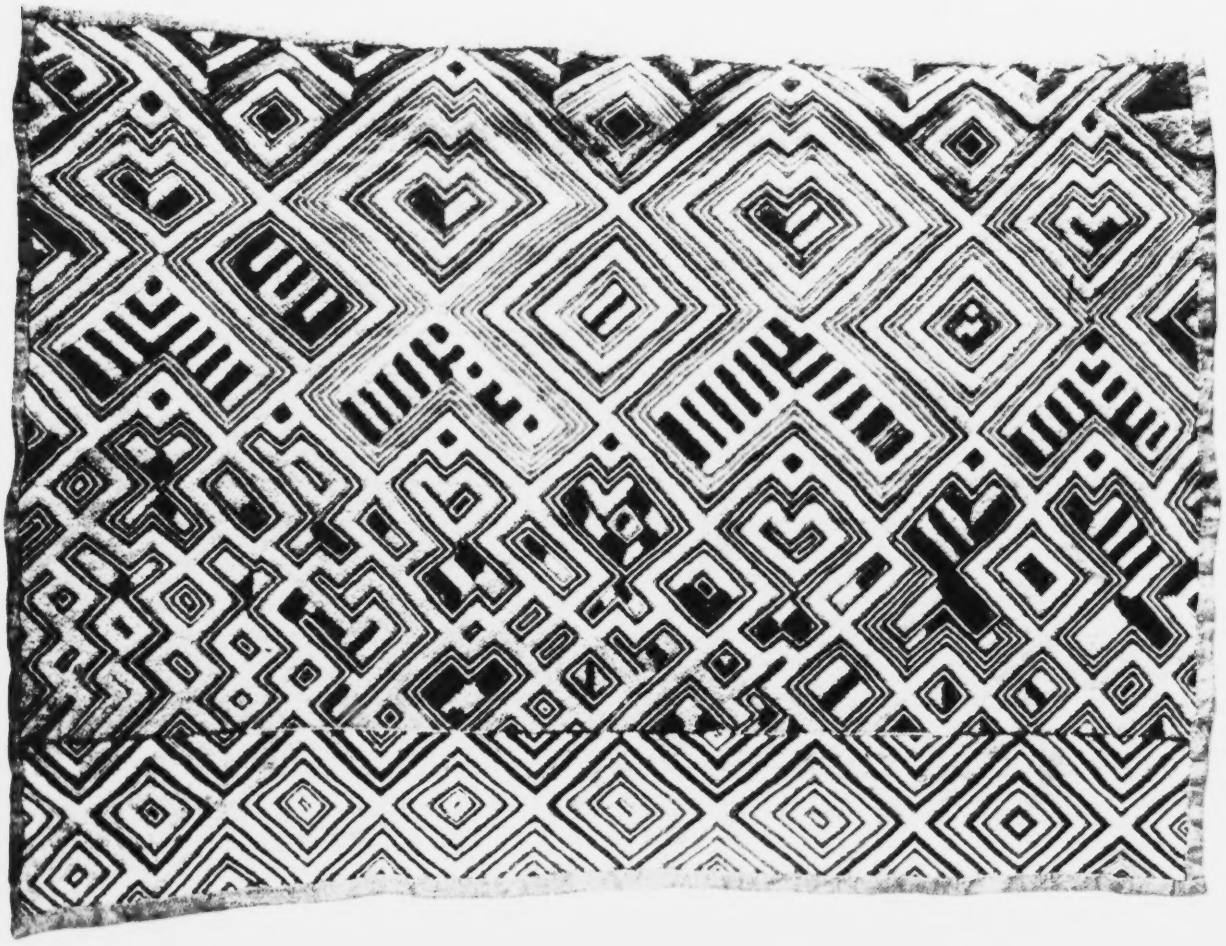
How Are the Textiles Decorated?

Shoowa women decorate raffia textiles by embroidering complex designs on them. The embroidery thread they use is also made from raffia. The threads are prepared in the same way as the raffia fibers that are used for weaving the cloth.

Shoowa women use two different embroidery stitches. One stitch is called *overstitching.* In overstitching, a woman guides her needle under and over the threads of the woven cloth. The other embroidery stitch Shoowa women use is called *plush stitching.* In plush stitching, a woman inserts a bundle of fibers under a woven thread where it crosses another thread. Then she cuts the fiber on both sides of the stitch with a knife. When she is done, the section of the cloth with plush stitching looks like velvet.

How Is the Pattern for the Textile Designed?

The women embroider without drawing any pattern on the cloth before they start. They create a pattern of motifs as they embroider. An entire textile may be embroidered using the same or different motifs, variations on motifs, or unexpected changes of pattern.



How Long Does It Take to Embroider a Textile?

Shoowa women work over a long period of time embroidering the woven raffia cloths. They may work sporadically for months or years on a single woven cloth. Usually they embroider in their spare time in the afternoon.

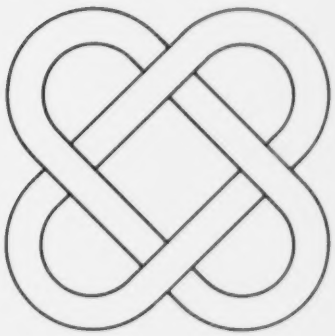
Draw Your Own Shoowa Textile!

Here's *your* chance to draw your own Shoowa textile! *Fill* the space on the next page. Draw your Shoowa textile with any of these motifs or with any new ones that you discovered in the exhibition. Repeat them! Vary them! You may also color them in if you want. Use the colors that you have seen in the exhibition.

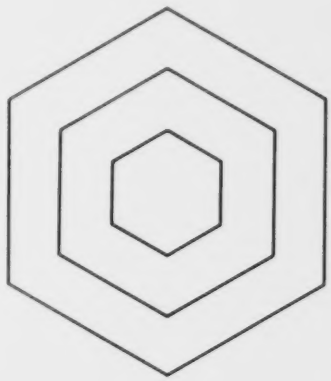
The vertical and horizontal lines will help you place the motifs.

Clue: The motifs touch up against each other to fill the space.

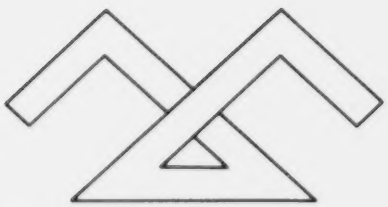
Have fun!



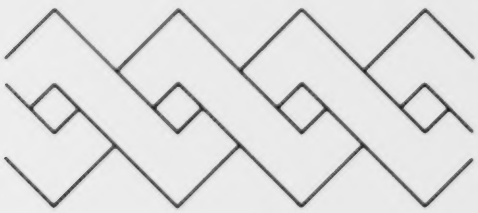
Imbol



Iyul



Lakiik



Nnaam

The textiles in this booklet and the exhibition are from private collections.

This booklet was conceived by Veronika Jenke and developed and written by Margaret Blechman, National Museum of African Art, Department of Education and Research.

The motifs in this booklet are based on those in Joseph Cornet, *Art Royal Kuba* (Milan: Edizioni Sipiel, 1982).

Answers

Activity 1
The *imbol* is in the bottom row, center.

Activity 2
The motif is in the second row from the top, second from the right. One variation of the motif is in the bottom row, third from the left. A second variation is in the second row from the top, third from the right.

Activity 3
There are four *nnaam* motifs that look like the drawing in Activity 3. There are five *nnaam* motifs that are variations. There is a total of nine *nnaam* motifs. Do not worry if you cannot find all of them. The most important thing is to find *one* in the textile.

Activity 4
This motif is called "eyebrows" because the two angled arcs of the motif look like a person's eyebrows. There are eight upside down *lakiik* motifs. The *lakiik* motif is very hard to find. The most important thing is to find *one* that is upside down.

Activity 5
First motif: fourth row from the bottom.
Second motif: third row from the bottom.
Third motif: sixth row from the top.
Fourth motif: fifth row from the top.
Fifth motif: second row from the top.
Sixth motif: top row.

Activity 6
The Shoowa people call the *iyul* motif "the tortoise" because it looks like the patterns on a tortoise's shell. The patterns in the centers of the *iyul* motifs are tan, black and white.

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